

# America's Military Base on Diego Garcia: What's Next?

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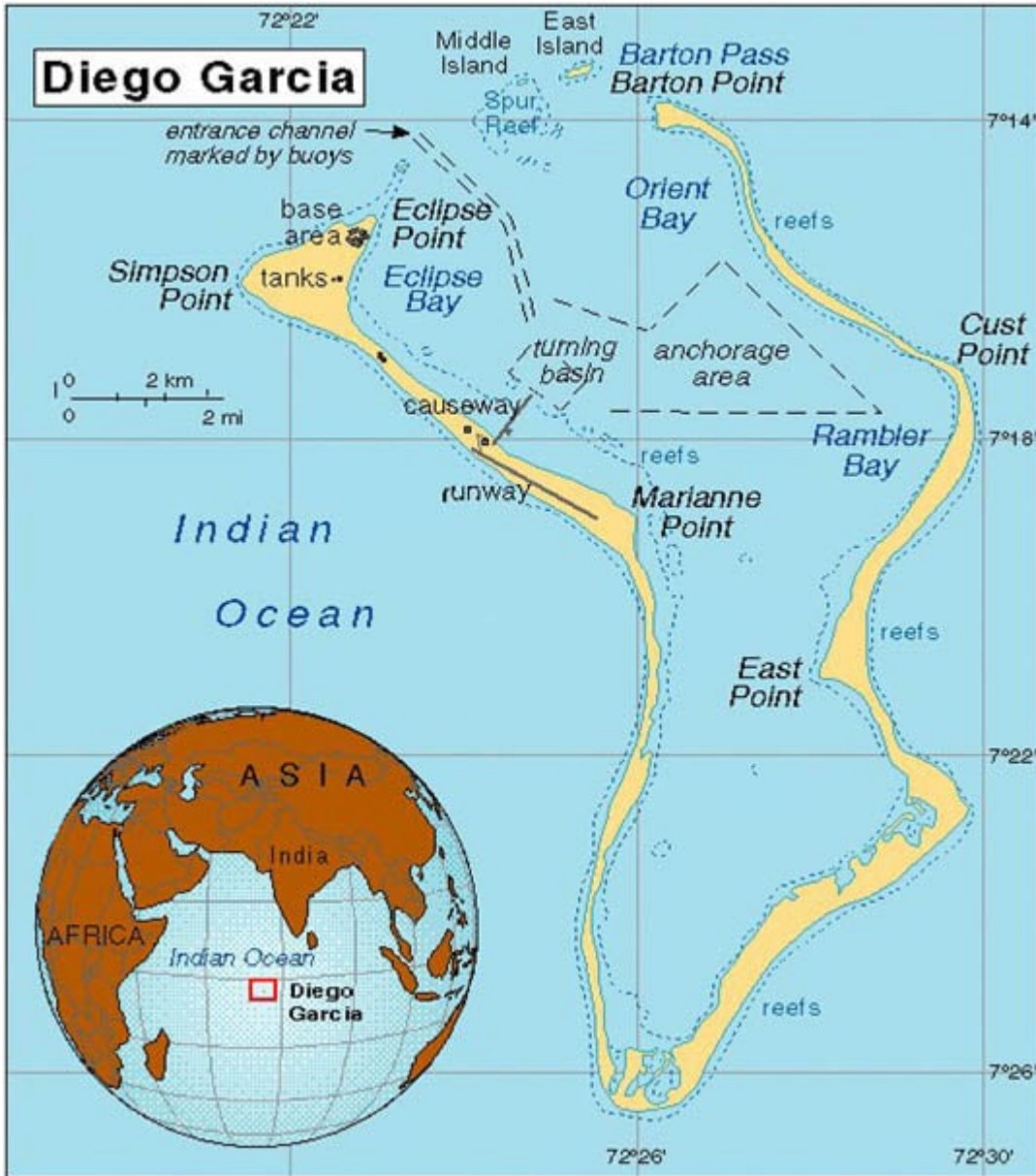
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Region: [Asia](#)

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*The 50 years term of the agreement between Great Britain and the USA regarding the Pentagon's lease of Diego Garcia atoll, which is located in the heart of the Indian Ocean, for military purposes expires in December 2016. However, chances are it could be prolonged for 20 years till December 2036.*

For more than a dozen years, this horseshoe atoll has been shrouded in secrets and myths that have caused a general curiosity of quite a different nature. Rich German and Italian tourists that rested on the Maldives Islands and got a bellyful of the local beautiful landscapes rented a fishing boat to visit a secret base on Diego Garcia. Having managed to approach the atoll up close, they were detained and deported. The curiosity was aroused by information on a secret prison located on the premises that is similar to Guantanamo, which retained either the Sri Lankan fishermen or the other perpetrators of the island's borders. Media information on the presence of a secret deep-water base (in fact, an entire underwater city) also fuelled speculations, which meant that all movements in the Indian Ocean zone as well as the 5 high-tech monitoring stations connected to the Global Search System with sites in Hawaii, Kwajalein, and Colorado Springs were listened on.



This base's obscure history raises many questions. **The first one** is why does this land fragment attract so much attention, and what is the fate of the military base, which the Pentagon has considered the most strategically important among many of the same "points" outside the US borders for more than a half a century, and which is also called the "base of shame" around the world?

Initially, it was known that the USA had not made any official payments for the island's lease. Later on, the information appeared that it had been leased in exchange for a \$14 million discount obtained from the USA for London to acquire the Polaris submarine-based ballistic missiles.

Looking at the map, one can see the most convenient methods of projecting power into the direction of the Middle East, the Persian Gulf, South Asia, Southeast Asia, and the South China Sea. Their use allowed the Pentagon to react instantly to events in the "hot spots" and to conduct military campaigns during the Gulf War of 1990-1991 and the anti-terrorist war in Afghanistan and Iraq. For this purpose, 16 separate units were located on Diego Garcia, including a naval support base and a strategic bomber airfield base, the point locations for guided missile submarines and a nuclear weapons storage. The base was

important both for maintaining tight control of the oil streams from the Gulf into South Asia, Southeast Asia, and North Asia, and for curbing China's military rise and the presence of the Chinese submarines in the Indian Ocean.

**The second one** is: Will the myth that the island is "uninhabited" that was imposed to the world by Washington and London be finally dispelled? In order to understand this myth, let us consider the most gloomy pages of a cruel narrative on the expulsion of the Ilois in 1966. The Ilois were the native citizens, each of whom obtained a tiny compensation worth 3 thousand pounds per person from the British government to get established in a new place that was hardly suitable for habitation. This deal was shrewdly wrapped up by Harold Wilson (the Labour government) and Lyndon Johnson (the Democratic government) during the signing of the agreement on the lease of Diego Garcia, which in fact did not exist and was just an exchange of notes). The list of details in the Ilois struggle for their right to return home is rather long, and it includes suits in the British Parliament and the Supreme Court, calls to the European Parliament, appeals to the African Union and the 1982 UN Tribunal for the Law of the Sea, etc. These were heard by the three Nobel Prize winners, dozens of members of the British Parliament. However, the British government used the royal prerogative to block the problem resolution, noting the high cost of its implementation – according to the results of a study conducted by the auditing company KPMG on commission from the British Foreign Office, returning the displaced persons to the island would cost the British treasury 66 million pounds. In 2010, impeding the immigration, London organized an end run by announcing the creation of the maritime protected zone around the Chagos Archipelago, where fishing was banned and other human activities limited.

During the negotiations on the fate of Diego Garcia in 2014 and 2016, Barack Obama and David Cameron had to discuss the problem of the Ilois migration at such a high diplomatic level.

**The third one** is why, despite all the negativity around the base and criticism from the international community, its relevance among the new actors in international relations in the Indian Ocean is growing like a snowball? Great Britain plans that were announced in 2014 to place military platforms, an aircraft carrier, nuclear submarines, support ships, aircraft of the Royal Navy and Air Forces at the newly opened base Mina Salman in Bahrain demonstrate **the return of London to the " East of Suez"**, in the course of which Diego Garcia might become particularly important for England. The expansion in the past two years of various interests and the desire of the Federal Republic of Germany to participate in the political and strategic trends in the India Ocean create an idea to search strategically convenient sites in the region **for the German bases**. Given the US approval, Djibouti and Diego Garcia might be interesting for Germany, as the German destroyer or torpedo boat destroyer with the Navy support ships might be operational. After long-lasting speculations and doubts, the Agreement on the military logistics between the USA and India signed in August 2016 will allow the Parties to use each other's military bases for technical support, servicing, refuelling, and other actions. Does this mean that the agreement will be effective for both parties, and that India will acquire access to Diego Garcia and Djibouti?

During the 2016 pre-election campaign, the US presidential candidate, Donald Trump, declared that Japan and South Korea should pay more for the US progressive military presence in Asia. He was surprised by a huge number of the US overseas bases.

Does this mean that after entering the White House, Donald Trump will commit to making

considerable changes in this context? Apparently, all this may sink into oblivion due their lack of basis. However, although there is no confirmation of the extension of the Diego Garcia lease, there is no doubt that it will happen in the nearest future, as it is in the interests of both countries.

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